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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

(for the period from 21 July 2001 to 16 January 2002)

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1365 (2001) of 31 July 2001, by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for a further period of six months, until 31 January 2002. It covers developments since my previous report, dated 20 July 2001 (S/2001/714).

II. Situation in the area of operation

2. The situation continued to be generally stable throughout most of the UNIFIL area of operation, with the exception of ongoing tensions and breaches of the Blue Line in the Shab'a farms area (see para. 4 below). During the reporting period, there was a comparative decrease in the number of ground violations of the line, with those from the Lebanese side primarily attributable to crossings by shepherds, picnickers and occasional vehicles, and with only one recorded from the Israeli side.

3. Israeli air violations of the Blue Line, however, continued on an almost daily basis, penetrating deep into Lebanese airspace. These incursions are not justified and cause great concern to the civilian population, particularly low-altitude flights that break the sound barrier over populated areas. The air violations are ongoing, although démarches to the Israeli authorities, calling on them to cease the overflights and to fully respect the Blue Line, have been made repeatedly by me, other senior United Nations officials and a number of interested Governments. As from 11 October, my Personal Representative for southern Lebanon, Staffan de Mistura, began issuing public statements to the same effect on the occurrence of each air violation. He has also made it clear that no violations of the Blue Line can be accepted by the United Nations, and that no violation can justify another.

4. Two serious breaches of the ceasefire occurred in the Shab'a farms area. On 3 October, Hizbollah fired 18 missiles and 33 mortar rounds at two positions of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) on the line south-east of Kafr Shuba. On 22 October, Hizbollah fired 10 missiles and 61 mortar rounds at five IDF positions in the same vicinity. In both instances, IDF responded with heavy artillery and mortar fire to the Lebanese side of the line in the same vicinity, in the latter case also dropping two air-to-ground missiles. There were no casualties from either incident.

5. Demonstrators on the Lebanese side gathered periodically at the points of friction identified in my previous reports, Sheikh Abbad Hill east of Hula and Fatima gate west of Metulla, to throw stones and other objects at Israeli personnel across the line. The trend, noted in my previous report, of fewer incidents and generally smaller crowds continued. There was one incident on 17 December in which a Lebanese demonstrator who threw firecrackers to the Israeli side of Sheikh Abbad Hill was shot and wounded in the leg by an Israeli soldier.

6. Local administration in the south was further strengthened during the reporting period, linked in

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large part to the successful municipal elections held in southern Lebanon in early September, which were marked by high voter turnout. Communications, health and welfare systems, and postal services made further slow progress towards integration with the rest of the country. The 1,000-strong contingent of the Lebanese Joint Security Force, comprising army and internal security forces, continued to operate in the areas vacated by Israel and increased their activity near the Blue Line, intervening on several occasions to avert potential threats to peace and security.

7. The Government of Lebanon continued to maintain the position that, so long as there was no comprehensive peace with Israel, the Lebanese armed forces would not be deployed along the Blue Line. In this vacuum, Hizbollah increased its visible presence near the line through its network of mobile and fixed positions. In August, Hizbollah established a presence adjacent to Ghajar, a village straddling the Blue Line with two thirds on the Lebanese side and one third on the Israeli side. Confrontation in this area has thus far been avoided owing to the restraint shown by both sides. Hizbollah also continued to extend social, medical and educational services to the local population in areas near the Blue Line.

8. On several occasions, Hizbollah personnel interfered with the freedom of movement of UNIFIL. Although freedom of movement was re-established after UNIFIL brought specific restrictions to the attention of the Lebanese authorities, the restrictions are recurrent.

9. The focus of UNIFIL operations remained on the Blue Line and the adjacent area, where UNIFIL continued its efforts to maintain the ceasefire through patrols, observation from fixed positions and close contact with the parties, the latter with a view to correcting violations, resolving incidents and preventing escalation.

10 UNIFIL continued to assist the civilian population in the form of medical care, water projects, equipment or services for schools and orphanages and supplies of social services to the needy. This assistance was provided from resources made available by troop-contributing countries. UNIFIL medical centres and mobile teams provided medical care to an average of 5,000 civilian patients per month. A field dental programme treated approximately 200 cases per month. Veterinary assistance was provided to some villages within the UNIFIL area of operation. UNIFIL cooperated closely on humanitarian matters with the Lebanese authorities, United Nations agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other organizations and agencies operating in Lebanon.

11. The United Nations continued to facilitate international assistance to the Government of Lebanon for mine action in southern Lebanon under the close supervision of my Personal Representative and in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). A memorandum of understanding was concluded between the United Arab Emirates and Lebanon, and an International Support Group for Mine Action was created, bringing together 22 countries involved in mine action in Lebanon. The regional mine action coordination cell, established by the United Nations Mine Action Service in Tyre, was expanded to enhance its capability for operational coordination, quality assurance and information management for United Nations mine action in Lebanon.

12. Concern over the number of mines and unexploded ordnance in southern Lebanon took on a new dimension when in December, IDF turned over to UNIFIL a substantial amount of information on the presence of additional minefields in the area, most within a short distance of the Blue Line.

13. A number of civilian casualties due to mine incidents have been recorded. Since July, 2 civilians have died and 10 were injured as a result of exploding mines and ordnance. During the reporting period, UNIFIL demolished more than 368 mines and rounds of unexploded ordnance.

14. Progress has been achieved in discussions between the United Nations and Israel on issues connected to the UNIFIL videotapes of events related to the abduction by Hizbollah of three Israeli soldiers on 7 October 2000 (see S/2001/714, para. 10).

15. My Personal Representative worked in close collaboration with UNDP and the World Bank to facilitate the funding and implementation of development projects in the south by privately and publicly advocating the needs of the area. UNDP continued to lead the efforts of the United Nations system in working with the Lebanese authorities for the development and rehabilitation of the south.

III. Organizational matters

16. The reconfiguration and redeployment of UNIFIL proceeded as set out in my report of 30 April last year (S/2001/423). Following the repatriation of the Nepalese battalion and the Polish engineering company at the end of July, the Finnish and Irish battalions were repatriated in October and November respectively. UNIFIL closed a number of rear positions and moved troops into closer proximity to the Blue Line. A map showing the current deployment of UNIFIL is attached.

17. As a result of the above changes, as at 31 December, UNIFIL comprised 3,494 troops, from Fiji (458), France (233), Ghana (811), India (819), Italy (52), Poland (483) and Ukraine (638). UNIFIL was assisted in its tasks by 51 military observers of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO). In addition, UNIFIL employed 448 civilian staff, of whom 135 were recruited internationally and 313 locally.

18. Major General Lalit Mohan Tewari was appointed as Force Commander and took up his duties on 19 August 2001. Mr. de Mistura continued to act as my Personal Representative in Beirut.

19. I regret to report the death of a Ghanaian member of the Force due to natural causes. Since the establishment of UNIFIL, 239 members of the Force have lost their lives: 78 as a result of firings or bomb explosions, 101 as a result of accidents and 60 from other causes. Firing or mine explosions wounded a total of 344.

IV. Financial aspects

20. By its resolutions 55/180 B of 14 June 2001 and 56/214 of 21 December 2001, the General Assembly appropriated the amount of $143 million gross, equivalent to a monthly rate of $11.9 million gross, for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2001 to 30 June 2002. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of UNIFIL beyond 31 January 2002, as recommended in paragraph 29 below, the cost of its maintenance would be limited to the monthly rate approved by the General Assembly.

21. As at 15 December 2001, unpaid assessments to the special account for UNIFIL for the period since its inception to 31 December 2001 amounted to $166.5 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations at that date amounted to $1,979.1 million.

V. Observations

22. The UNIFIL area of operation has been generally calm, with low incident and tension levels recorded since my previous report. The focus of UNIFIL operations remained on the Blue Line and the adjacent area, with UNIFIL working with the parties to avert or correct violations and to defuse tensions.

23. The serious breaches of the ceasefire in the Shab'a farms area remained a significant cause of concern. It appears that over the past several months, both parties have exercised greater restraint in this regard. I would hope that this is indicative of a renewed commitment on both sides to fully honour their obligation to respect the Blue Line. The ongoing Israeli incursions into sovereign Lebanese airspace nevertheless remain a troubling counter-indication. I once again emphasize the critical need for all parties concerned to respect the Blue Line, as repeatedly called for by the Security Council, to cease all violations thereof and to refrain from any action that could serve to destabilize the situation.

24. The Government of Lebanon continued to take additional steps to restore its effective authority throughout the south, but this was limited to strengthening the presence of security forces and supporting the local administration, and did not include additional deployment of the Lebanese army. The Government of Lebanon has continued to let Hizbollah operate close to the Blue Line. More steps can be taken to extend the Government's authority to all of southern Lebanon, as called for by the Council most recently in its resolution 1365 (2001). The Government should make a more concerted effort to take full responsibility for the provision of basic services to the population and for the deployment of the army.

25. In my report of 22 January 2001 (S/2001/66), I noted that UNIFIL, having essentially completed two of the three parts of its mandate, had effectively assumed the functions of an observer mission. I noted, however, that in view of the conditions in the region, the tasks of UNIFIL should be carried out by a combination of armed infantry and unarmed observers. I recommended, therefore, a phased reconfiguration of the Force to a strength of close to 2,000 all ranks,

supported by the unarmed military observers of UNTSO, the strength of the latter to remain unaltered.

26. Taking into account the Security Council's request in paragraphs 3 and 14 of its resolution 1365 (2001), I recommend that the reconfiguration proceed as set forth in paragraph 10 of my report of 30 April 2001 (S/2001/423). The situation on the ground continues to support a prudent approach. Taken together with the need to harmonize the reconfiguration with the normal troop rotation schedule, this will require that the further reductions needed to complete the reconfiguration commence in June of this year. The bulk of the reduction would be achieved by the non-replacement of the Fijian contingent and the decrease of the Ukrainian battalion to less than half of its current strength, retaining its demining component. The Force would thus be stabilized at a strength of close to 2,000 all ranks by the end of 2002.

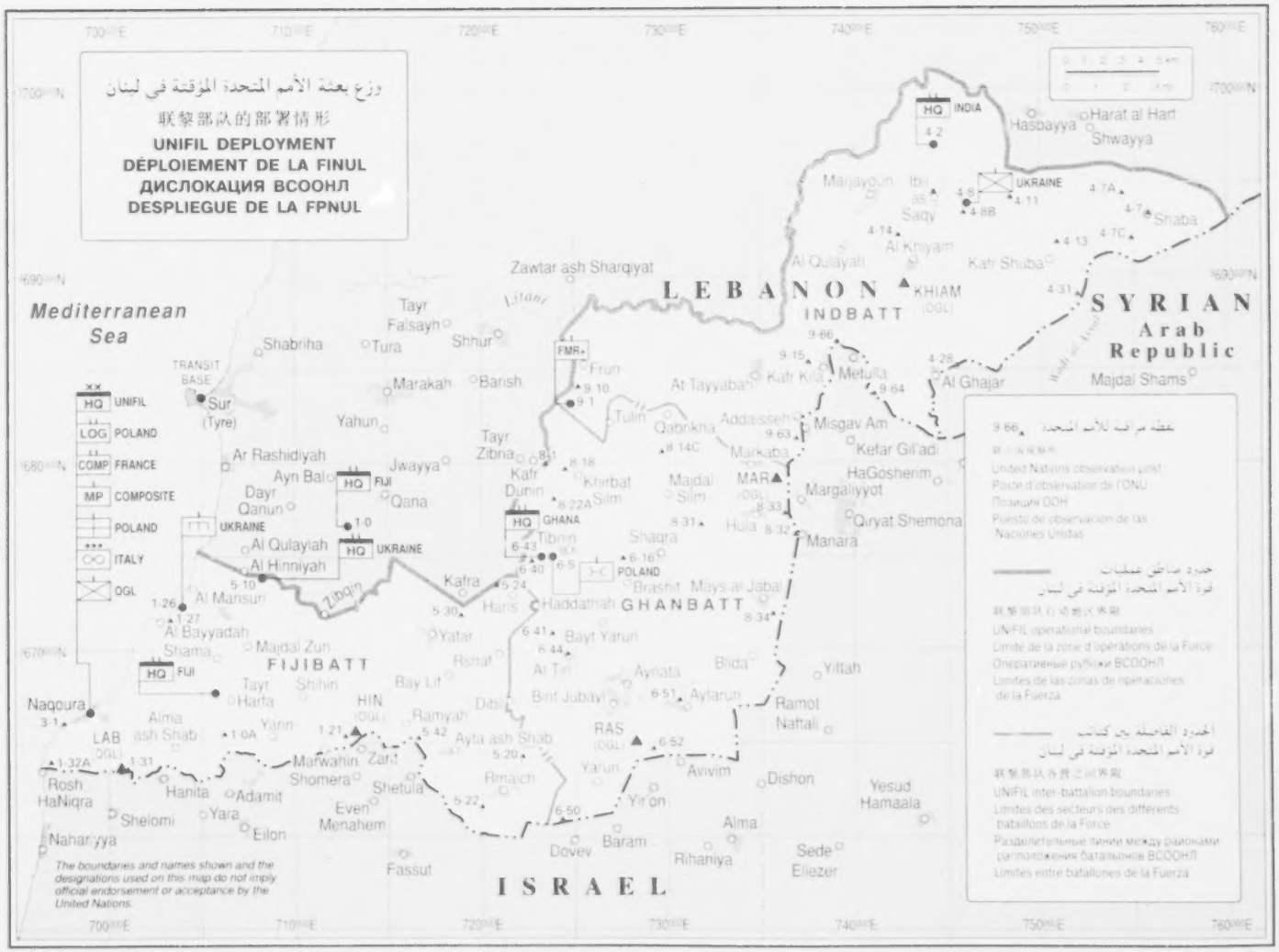
27. Observer Group Lebanon is moving towards a more mobile concept; however, in view of the conditions on the ground and the longer-term role of UNTSO in the region, the Group will maintain patrol bases, where the observers will be accommodated. Security for those bases will be provided largely by UNIFIL, thus freeing more observers for their patrolling, investigative and liaison functions.

28. A reconfigured UNIFIL will continue to contribute towards stability in southern Lebanon by monitoring and observing along the Blue Line. At the same time, given the tensions in the region, there is an ongoing need for United Nations political and diplomatic support for the parties to establish lasting peace and security. Accordingly, my Personal Representative will pursue actively his current efforts, in close consultation with Terje Roed-Larsen, my Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

29. In a letter dated 9 January 2002 (S/2002/40), the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations conveyed to me his Government's request that the Security Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further period of six months. In the light of conditions prevailing in the area, the Security Council may wish to decide to extend the mandate until 31 July 2002, in line with paragraph 26 above.

30. I must again draw attention to the serious shortfall in the funding of the Force. At present, unpaid assessments amount to $166.5 million. This represents money owed to the Member States that contribute the troops that make up the Force. I appeal to all Member States to pay their assessments promptly and in full and to clear all remaining arrears. I should like to express my gratitude to the Governments contributing troops to the Force for their understanding and patience.

31. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to Mr. de Mistura, my Personal Representative, and to pay tribute to the men and women of UNIFIL and Major General Tewari for the manner in which they have carried out their tasks. Their discipline and bearing have been of a high order, reflecting credit on themselves and the United Nations.



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